

## The Cholla Jumps

by the-cholla-jumps on Apr.06, 2010, under Education, Politics

### Secretary of State Bennett ” Lower the sales tax, but broaden the base.”



According to the Secretary, there are solutions but they will take political will and a bi-partisan process that would require an inventory of legislative resentments, fears, and behaviors. It would require an acknowledgement of past fiscal wrongs and the ability to simply and without political rhetoric educate the voter about the realities of our true fiscal picture.

A few of the solutions would relieve the state of the need to raise the one cent sales tax as proposed by Governor Jan Brewer with Proposition 100, and instead lower the sales tax rates but broaden what is taxed. There are presently almost 500 exemptions to the sales tax code. If those exemptions are removed it would broaden the diversity of the revenue stream and give the State dependable projections of revenue.

Presently of the almost 11 billion dollars in K-12 education funding, the legislature only has control of approximately 5 billion of it through the general fund and is mandated to increase general fund spending by 2% per year regardless of revenue to the state. The rest is mandated by the voters or the Federal government. In order to give the legislature some breathing room, it would require a voter approved amendment to correct this very basic matter of financial accountability.

In a presentation to a precinct meeting in Legislative District 29, he presented his now famous Kleenex box tower of the state budget. It can be seen in video format at [www.azsos.gov](http://www.azsos.gov). If you haven't seen it yet, go to the site and watch. It is an eye opening display of just how our budget process has brought us to the fiscal crisis our state is in. He dispels the myths about the percentages of education funding cuts.

When all sources of revenue for education are counted the state has only reduced education spending in this state by about 1%. But the education lobby usually only tells you about one portion of the overall spending, commonly referred to as M& O or maintenance and operations. The lobbyists for the education dollar also like to say that Arizona is 49<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states in per pupil spending. That simply is not true. Presently, there are 16 states in the United States that claim they are 49<sup>th</sup> out of 50. What? The

reality is that Arizona, when all revenue is factored, spends \$250,000 per classroom. Now, seriously, do you see \$250,000 a year spent in your child's classroom? Where the heck is the money going? According to Bennett, you, yes you, Mom and Dad, small business owner, homeowners, you need to start attending and participating at your local school board meetings and hold them accountable.

One of the last subjects we talked about was the office of the Secretary of State itself. I asked him if he supported changing the name of the office to Lieutenant Governor and he said he not only supported it but would also like to link them as a team elected together like the President and Vice-president of the United States. But again that would take political will and courage from the legislature and ultimately the will of the people to approve the constitutional amendment that is necessary to do it.

As the man who is a governor's heartbeat or, as is the common practice in Arizona, a resignation away from the Executive Office, I am confident in his capabilities.

Ken Bennett was born in Tucson in 1959. Ken began his legislative career in 1998 and served four terms in the state Senate and was the Senate president his final four years ending his final term due to term limits in 2007. A former member of the State Board of Education, he served on the Arizona Charter Schools Board and is a founding member of Education Leaders Council in Washington DC.

But his entire career has not been just one of public service. He worked in the private sector developing alternative energy sources and energy-efficient building technologies. He is currently chairman of the Board of Directors for Prescott-based Global Building Systems Inc and Energy Tech America. He serves on the boards of Cancer Centers of America and EMTA and is the former CEO of Bennett Oil Company, a fuel distribution company and continues with its board.

I have met Ken on a number of occasions before but this was the most in depth time I have had the opportunity to have with him. He is personable and has an easy manner about him that is not only approachable but receivable as well. He looks you in the eye when he speaks, is not easily distracted and finishes his thoughts with an ease that is natural and not stiff or practiced.

*In the spirit of disclosure, Secretary Bennett is a Republican running for re-election as Secretary of State.*